

1 John 3:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Analysis

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. John calls for authentic love demonstrated in action. "My little children" (*teknia mou*) again expresses pastoral affection. "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue" (*mē agapōmen logō mēde tē glōssē*)—the negative command targets mere verbal profession. Logos (word) and glōssa (tongue) emphasize spoken claims without corresponding action.

"But in deed and in truth" (*alla en ergō kai alētheia*)—ergon (*ἔργον*) means work or deed, concrete action. Alētheia (*ἀλήθεια*) means truth or reality. Genuine love manifests in actual deeds and true reality, not merely pleasant words. The conjunction "and" links deed and truth—love must be both active (deed) and genuine (truth). Hypocritical actions don't qualify, nor do sincere feelings lacking concrete expression.

This principle pervades Scripture. James condemns faith without works (James 2:14-26). Jesus taught that obedience, not mere profession, proves love for Him (John 14:15, 21). Paul described love in terms of concrete actions (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). John's emphasis on deeds doesn't contradict salvation by grace through faith; rather, it insists that saving faith produces loving deeds as inevitable fruit. Christianity is irreducibly practical—theology always eventuates in ethics, belief in behavior, doctrine in duty.

Historical Context

The ancient world, like today, had no shortage of fine-sounding rhetoric divorced from reality. Greek sophists excelled at persuasive speech without moral substance. Stoic philosophers discussed virtue while treating slaves brutally. Religious leaders proclaimed piety while neglecting justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23). Against this backdrop, Christianity's emphasis on practical love—deed and truth—was remarkable.

The early church's reputation for genuine care for widows, orphans, the sick, and poor gave credibility to their message. Emperor Julian the Apostate (4th century) lamented that "the impious Galileans" (Christians) cared for not only their own poor but pagan poor as well, making Christianity attractive. John's exhortation to love in deed and truth reflected Christianity's practical, transformative nature from its beginning.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How can you evaluate whether your love is merely in word and tongue or genuinely in deed and truth?
2. What specific deeds of love toward fellow believers should you be doing that you're currently only talking about?
3. How does the command to love 'in truth' (genuinely, without hypocrisy) challenge you regarding motivations for your actions?

Interlinear Text

Τεκνία	μου,	μὴ	ἀγαπῶμεν	λόγῳ	μηδὲ	γλώσσῃ	ἀλλ'
little children	My	not	let us	in word	neither	in tongue	but
G5040	G3450	G3361	G25	G3056	G3366	G1100	G235
ἔργῳ	καὶ	ἀληθείᾳ					
in deed	and	in truth					
G2041	G2532	G225					

Additional Cross-References

Romans 12:9 (Love): Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

1 Peter 1:22 (Love): Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Galatians 5:13 (Love): For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Ephesians 4:15 (Love): But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

1 John 2:1 (Parallel theme): My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

1 Thessalonians 1:3 (Love): Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

Ezekiel 33:31 (Love): And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

